

You can be ready if dementia strikes

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Canadian society has a big problem, which is going to get exponentially worse as we baby boomers mature.

The estimated societal cost of Alzheimer's disease and all other dementia in 2008 was \$15 billion. A study released last week estimates these same costs will total \$153 billion by 2038. Yes, a 10-fold increase!

This is based on the number of people with Alzheimer's and related dementia growing from the current 480,600 Canadians to an estimated 1,125,200 citizens in 2038.

This means a total of 5.5 million people will be affected by dementia between 2008 and 2038. These and other shocking predictions are contained in a new report called *Rising Tide: The Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*. It is published by the Alzheimer Society, based on a study conducted by RiskAnalytica, a leading firm in the burgeoning area of risk management. This project was funded by Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Institute of Health Research and Pfizer Canada.

Though the numbers are mind-numbing, they make sense when you think of how large a percentage of our population will be over 65 in 20 years, compared to now. Baby boomers are going to wreak havoc with aging, in the same way they have revolutionized all other trends, customs and institutions since 1950, for better or worse.

And, even though many boomers have refused to grow up, age will inevitably catch up to them, as it does with everyone who is lucky enough to grow old (as opposed to the alternative.)

Here's what I need you to do:

- Prepare a Power of Attorney (PA), giving a trusted individual or trust company the legal authority to look after your affairs. You can specify that this power will only take place if you are certified as mentally incapacitated, if you wish. You do this with a lawyer and the cost is nominal. You can name a spouse, other family member, good friend, professional adviser or a trust company. Pick carefully, as your affairs may be in this person's hands at some point in the future. Please place a comment at www.davidchristianson.com to let me know if you run into any challenges and to let me know you have signed a PA.
- Prepare an advance health care directive or PA for health issues (a "living will"), naming a person you trust as your health-care proxy and specifying the limits you want set on extraordinary measures taken to keep you alive.
- Get active, physically and mentally. Research shows you can at least delay the onset of dementia simply by integrating healthy living habits. Ask your provincial Alzheimer Society or go to www.alzheimer.ca "brain boost" area for specific tips, but I think you know what I'm talking about: eat healthy, exercise, do puzzles and games, read instead of watching TV, stay active and creative.
- Consider volunteering or donating to your provincial Alzheimer Society, which co-ordinates help for families who are affected, provides co-ordination and a lobby for government action and, nationally, funds valuable research into treatments and prevention.

You can read or download the full report from www.alzheimer.ca or ask the local office for a summary. If you are concerned and you want Canada's elected officials to duplicate the leadership shown by other countries to diminish the profound effects of this issue, send them a letter or email, or even phone. Operators are standing by.

Deadline is Jan. 31 for expenses eligible for the Home Renovation Tax Credit, and to make your annual interest payments on inter-family loans, to maintain the loans at CRA's current low prescribed rate of one per cent.

We have more details and tips on both at www.davidchristianson.com.

Have a great weekend!

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